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# JAPAN AND ASIATIC LEADERSHIP.

BY PAUL S. REINSCH.

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WITH the last decade there has dawned upon the Japanese mind an influence far transcending any former national experiences,—the feeling of a sacred mission, by which the Island Nation is called to act as the guardian of Asiatic civilization, to summon the peoples of Asia to a realization of their unity, and to defend the ideals and treasures of Asiatic life against ruthless destruction through foreign invasion.

It is but a short time since the broader and more representative minds among the Asiatic races have begun to realize the unity of Asiatic civilization. The endless variety in speech and custom, the difference in character and temper between the Chinese and the Hindu, the opposite political destiny that has made one nation subject to foreigners while it has led another into an honored position among the independent Powers—all these differences can no longer obscure the deep unity of customs and of ideals that pervades the entire Orient. This unified character of Oriental life, in its essence so totally different from Western civilization, frequently expresses itself on the surface in customs and institutions which seem to us bizarre and even barbarous, and which invite the active reformer from the West to sweep them away and put in their place a more enlightened system. But whoever considers carefully the conditions of the Orient may arrive at a very different conclusion, and may see even in these apparently backward institutions the marks of a broad and noble ideal of life. The vastness of Oriental populations, the long duration of their institutions, create a feeling of permanence and peace. The frequency of natural catastrophes, the overpowering aspect of mountains, torrents, and typhoons, have given the Orientals an entirely deferential attitude towards nature,

which they have not tried to conquer or subdue. Busied rather with the causes of things and with the general laws of existence, they turn to religion and philosophy, and give but little attention to practical facts, to scientific control of the forces of nature, and to the betterment of social conditions. The pessimistic tinge of Oriental thought is due to this feeling of helplessness, which causes the world and existence to appear as a great procession of shadows, full of suffering and evil. But in all this impermanence, in the multitude of fleeting and ephemeral individual existences, the Oriental mind sees the manifestation of an omnipresent force—eternal change, symbolized by the figure of the dragon. The deepest feeling in Oriental thought is the poetry of vanishing life. The withered rose, whose fragrance has delighted us for a day, is but the symbol of the maiden's beauty and the grace and activity of the young warrior, who also fade and fall after a brief span, their places taken by a new array of budding spirits.

The intellectual bond which unites the Orient, and best interprets its deepest soul, is Buddhism. Resting upon the same philosophical foundation as Brahmanism, it really constitutes the missionary principle of the great Indian religion, through which the Farther Indies, China, and even the distant islands of Japan, were brought into touch with the original seat of Oriental thought and culture. The poetry of Oriental thought finds its most potent expression in the philosophy of eternal change and final annihilation of all sensible existence, taught by Gautama. This Asiatic religion of poetic insight is the expression of that higher ideal to which all the activities and ideas of Oriental life are tributary—search for the universal principle, together with endless variety in individual existence. Thus the rural locality is the real centre of Asiatic life. There is nothing like the European centralization of authority and culture. Local self-government, with little interference by the central authorities, the preservation of immemorial customs, not reduced to set form nor modified by conscious legislation, such is the framework of Oriental polity. In China, the village governs itself, while the Imperial government fills the function of a counsellor and defender. Industry is similarly decentralized; it is carried on in the homes of the artisans, where labor is not a curse, but a natural activity and manifestation of daily life, graced by the

artistic character which pervades all Oriental handicraft. High respect is everywhere paid to intellectual forces, not only in the lands of the Brahman and Mandarin, but in the more militant Japan. Practical religion is made up partly of an idealization and worship of the all-encompassing forces of nature, partly of a feeling of loyalty to the spirits of the ancestors, whose thoughts and work are embodied in the life and spirit of the nation to-day.

Of this vast and ancient civilization, Japanese life is the flower and concentrated essence. The foundation stock of the Japanese nation was animated by the nomad instincts of Western Asia, by the fierce courage of marauding tribes. The original basis of their national life is a worship of the past and of nature. Their temples commemorate the lives of heroes, but their festal days are not the anniversaries of battles; they mark the birth of flowers. In April, the multitudes begin their fond pilgrimages to see the blossoming cherry-trees, languid summer brings the nymphlike lotus, and late in fall the gorgeous chrysanthemum draws its crowds of worshippers from village and town. These earlier romantic and warlike instincts have been sobered and steadied by the social morality of Confucius, bestowed upon Japan by the Chinese nation, that great civilizer of Northern Asia. This system is often characterized as a congeries of mere platitudes; yet it has constituted an invaluable training in the simple and homely duties of neighborly life and in practical morality, a training necessary to the Orientals who are so idealistic, and so prone to overlook the near for the distant and mysterious. Coming last among all these influences, the poetical religion of Buddhism found the Japanese soul an especially responsive medium. The fleeting shadows of existence, lovely in their rapid succession and tragic death, the mystery of the soul, in which the memories of the past existence are reechoing—these were the forms of thought evoked by the great Asiatic religion in Japan. The flower of all these civilizing influences—Japanese art—was acquired from, and based upon, continental forms, and even now it best shows the historical development of the latter. Indeed, the genesis and progress of Oriental art can be studied in its completeness only in Japan, where the treasures of the past have not been at the mercy of succeeding waves of ruthless conquerors. But the Asiatic modes of art assumed an added re-

finement and poetical delicacy when they reached the Island Kingdom. The lovely background of a sweet nature, an inanimate world that is a melodious orchestra to the poetical drama of human existence, the spirit shadowings of former lives, the high heroism, the ready self-sacrifice of unselfish men and women, the delicate respect paid to the weak and old, the worship of heroic virtue, gave Japanese art a multitude of subjects in which to realize its most perfect expression.

In its passage to Japan, Buddhism underwent a great temperamental change,—its pessimism was softened and received a delicate artistic tinge. The insight into the deep mysteries of life which it affords has, with the Japanese, strengthened serious purpose and transfused the soul with pulsations of heroism. The tragic mood is the mood of greatness. Greek power and intellectual predominance declined with the tragedy, and our own England never furnished a higher revelation of spirited and energetic national life than when Shakespeare conjured up the tempests of the soul. Thus the undercurrent of Buddhist tragedy in Japanese life has not resulted in a debilitating pessimism, but constitutes a tonic inspiration to great deeds and to disdain for the petty and mean incidents of a mere bourgeois existence. While in Southern India vast populations have settled down to dreamy inactivity, thereto encouraged by the Buddhist belief in the nothingness of all existence, the spirit of Japan was better qualified to give the true interpretation of this deepest of Asiatic religions. Like her great English counterpart, Japan has assimilative talent of the highest order. But the intensity of her national life has enabled her to mould all the influences to which she has been subjected into a harmonious organic whole. This is chiefly due to the training she has always given herself in loyalty and social cohesion. These qualities have been put to a most decisive test in the last twenty-five years. While an unprecedented social change was going on, and while the entire mechanism of Western industrial life was being rapidly adopted, the leaders in this movement were animated with the desire not to copy Western civilization, but to assimilate those methods which would render them able to defend their own civilization against oppression or usurpation by the better armed nations of the world. No other hypothesis is possible, because it is unthinkable that a nation should give up its essential cus-

toms and beliefs, and still retain a unified and energetic national life. Thus while the Japanese have learned our methods and have successfully analyzed our system, they have remained loyal to the spirit of their own historic past. As the Western nations are becoming aware of this permanence of Asiatic ideals, they are beginning to be afraid of the new Power which has thus risen, and which must be counted with in any policy that would affect the destiny of the Orient.

The spectre of the yellow peril is thus evoked—the most chimerical phenomenon that has appeared in political thought since the Middle Ages. Russia has been encouraged to look upon herself as the St. George of the Western nations, called to wage war against the Oriental dragon. The real viciousness of this apparently harmless and hitherto modestly decorative creature was discovered by the German Emperor, who in his famous cartoon—a mixture of the styles of Gustave Doré and “Puck”—portrayed to the frightened imagination of Europe the terrors of an Oriental invasion. The military, industrial and racial peril with which Europe is thus threatened is the burden of the present song of Russian diplomacy, since the “treachery” of Japan in attacking before a solemn declaration of war has been fully exploited. Everywhere there is apparent a growing feeling of jealousy and suspicion of Japan’s motives.

Yet it cannot be denied that the attitude of Japan, before and since the furies of war were unchained, has been unequivocal. She is fighting to prevent a European autocracy from conquering the mastery of Asia. Under the circumstances, it is a perfectly natural and honorable ambition to arouse the peoples of that continent to a feeling of the value of their civilization and of the solidarity of their interests. We naturally ask ourselves the question whether, considering the character of this civilization, we have reason to fear its purposes. Yet, as represented by the great nations that are its true exponents, its first characteristic is peacefulness. China has given her civilization to the nations that surround her on all sides, without any desire to conquer them or to exploit their wealth. The soldier is distinctly subordinate to the man of peace in the national ideals. India herself, while torn by the most terrible internal dissensions, had essentially a policy and philosophy of peace; her woes, like those which have periodically overtaken China, being due to the lack

of effective resistance inviting the foreign invader and conqueror. Japan, with all the warlike spirit in her blood, has still set the ideals of peace above those of war, as is seen in her national festivals, and in the temper of her artistic and social life.

The civilizations of the Orient are essentially sedentary. They cling to the soil of their birth with many tenacious roots. The sacredness of the fatherland, the worship of the ancestors, the reverence of their tombs, are all forces of strong attachment. Industrial work in the Orient is also essentially home-keeping. It is a household art, graced and enlivened by creative spirit. The harsh slavery of modern factory life is known only in some European settlements. When we consider the fundamental ideas and customs of Asiatic civilization, we cannot escape the conclusion that, should Asia be allowed to develop along natural lines, she could never become a menace to our civilization.

As a matter of fact, no more fantastic idea has ever played a part in serious politics, than that of the military yellow peril. We need not consider the natural barriers erected against such an attack, nor the fact that in the methods of modern warfare the defensive is relatively far stronger than the attack; but there is in present Oriental conditions and ideas not the least vestige that can be used as a basis for alarmist prophecies. Neither China, India nor Japan has ever engaged in offensive warfare of conquest. They have themselves suffered at the hands of the hordes at the memory of which the nations of Europe are still trembling; and it is one of the glories of Japan to have successfully repelled these invaders, who again and again overran the rich countries of the continent.

The thought of an industrial peril has *prima facie* more probability. But before indulging in sensational visions it is well to remember that the Oriental nations can excel us only through efficiency, and that, in order to become dangerous competitors, they must develop our industrial and financial mechanism, they must have among their workmen the intelligence without which our highly complicated machinery would be useless. Their labor can no longer remain cheap; for, without raising the standard of living, the efficiency of European and American workmen cannot be approached. At the present time, a factory girl in Massachusetts does the work which in Japan is performed by six people. Should the Oriental manufacturer, in the course of

time, be able to turn out the coarser products, the finer articles would still be made by us. Such a development would be a distinct gain, since, the richer our customers and the more productive their industries, the more will they be able to purchase from us. With all the development of Japanese industry in the last three decades, her imports from the Western nations have increased thirtyfold. Moreover, Japan would be the last nation to destroy the promising market of China by an overdevelopment of Chinese manufacturing industries. For, if Japan has any definite ambition, it is that of creating an active commerce throughout the Orient, and reaping the vast profits of a middleman. Should Japan be successful in the present war, the exclusive policy initiated by Russia and France would be definitely defeated. Not only has Japan given the most positive assurances of an opposite policy, but it would plainly not be to her interest to take any different course. As an Oriental nation, she is able to create the routes and organizations of commerce throughout the Orient, far more speedily and effectively than any European nation, even were it to Orientalize itself. The Japanese are aware of the fact that the merchants of the world do not have perfect confidence in their commercial morality; and, with the same energy with which Japan transformed her industrial system, she is at present striving to improve her commercial methods and the morality of her merchant class. The latter have become prominent only since the Restoration, before which they were looked down upon, as they were in the ancient Greek state, as a class hardly respectable. But better men are entering the field, and the nation has an earnest desire to answer the demands of our social morality, as well as of its own.

Should Japan carry out her mission, she will strive to preserve the specific character of Oriental civilization and industry. European capital will not be invited to transform the East, nor will the factory system be introduced so rapidly as to unsettle the native industrial life. The peculiar excellence of Oriental fabrics will be preserved, and the glorious art of the Orient will be given a new opportunity to unfold itself. It is not by adopting our methods that the East can become strong and great, but by living its own life, that is, the life of peace and artistic industry. No great military or industrial conquest can be made by a people that abandons its own civilization.



On the other hand, should Russia be successful, she will have a free hand to enforce the policy of exclusiveness which she has already announced to the world in her treaty with China. Her disregard of international law in the present war, while she was weak, gives ample earnest of what she would do were she strong. The evasive answer given to Mr. Hay's note concerning the "open door" policy is a most excellent illustration of her diplomatic methods. Japan, in the event of success, would not be strong enough to hamper and exclude European commerce, but she would be given the opportunity and the power to call the Orient to a realization of its own spirit, and to cause it to develop along its natural lines. It is difficult to see just how humanity is to benefit from any different course, from Russian exclusiveness or from a capitalistic invasion of Asia. They would certainly bring small profit to the populations of Asia, who would be forced into a new slavery, as well as to our own home industries, which would find in Asia a competitor in their own methods, led by European skill and backed by unlimited financial power.

In order that either the industrial or military yellow peril should become a reality, a total transformation of all the customs and ideals of Oriental society would have to precede. This can be brought about only through our own action. If by constant attacks, by acts of burning injustice, the Asiatic peoples are made to feel that they must abandon every other purpose and concentrate all their strength upon military preparation, their serried ranks may assume a threatening attitude. We have so far done our best to sow the seeds of future trouble. The treachery practised against Japan by three European Powers, the repeated attacks upon Chinese integrity, the missionary activity undermining the very basis of Chinese social life, the horrid massacres of 1900, where the cross became to the Chinese the symbol of bloodshed, rapine and thievery, so that the European who knows China best declared that centuries only could eradicate the memory—all these facts are directly calculated to arouse that very peril which statesmen profess to be so anxious to allay. Russia herself has taken the most efficient course to awaken the bitterest racial animosities. Her signal disregard of solemn promises and her utter contempt for the legitimate national ambition of Japan, have been followed in the present war by methods not calculated to allay national bitterness, whatever may be the outcome of the struggle. The

massacre of the marines on the "Hitochi," where a thousand Japanese soldiers on an unarmed vessel were cut to pieces by a machine-gun fire lasting for three hours, was in strange contrast with the saving of the crew of the "Rurik," which had itself taken part in that murderous affair. Through his refusal to permit the burial of the dead around Port Arthur, the Russian commander is surrounding himself with a wall of horror which must dismay the bravest of the Japanese assailants and burn itself forever into their memories. The Russian government has encouraged the idea that it is engaged in a holy crusade against pagans; even the generals are loaded down with amulets, and the religious imagination of the soldiers is assiduously worked upon. By thus appealing to the stolid masses, the Russian leaders are stirring up the bitterest and deepest feelings of race hatred.

Thus when we look for the real source of the yellow peril, we shall probably find it in the Russian absolutist party, who are looking for an indefinite lease of power from Oriental sources; we shall find it in the imperialistic imagination of Kaiser Wilhelm, who is trembling for Kiao-Chao while he makes himself believe that he is trembling for Europe; we shall find it in the French desire to expand the Indo-Chinese sphere; in the capitalistic system, which is ready to destroy the character of Oriental life and industry and transform the patient masses of the Orient into competitors to our own laborers. It is to be expected that these forces will attempt to annihilate the effects of a Japanese victory by preparing an international interference for the "peace of Asia." But woe to the peace of the world if such an arrangement were again concluded, with the clear purpose to deny the right of the Orient to live its own life and to protect its own ideals. The last vestige of belief in international justice would be killed in the Japanese, and the entire Oriental world would be forced to realize that its safety lay alone in stubborn, fierce resistance. The real yellow peril would then arise, though even then the forces thus evoked might confine themselves to a purely defensive action. It is the present duty of British and American diplomacy to prevent such an injustice to Japan and the consequent danger to the peace of the world. Japan is fighting our battle. This is so well understood that in Germany and France it is popularly believed that our governments are setting her on. The very least that the Anglo-Saxon races can do for the repre-

sentative of their policy in the Orient, is to counteract the diplomatic influence that would by roundabout means again deprive the Japanese of the fruits of their unexampled self-sacrifice. We do not mean to indicate that the Japanese will demand Manchuria. They are undoubtedly sincere in their promise to restore this province to China, but they have a right to demand that Russian intrigue shall forever be shut out from that country.

The yellow peril is of our own making. There is no irrepressible conflict between Oriental and Western civilization. On the contrary, they are complementary to each other, not competitive. During the last century our own civilization, torn by internal conflicts and troubled by uncertainties, has sought for broader views in Oriental thought; Japanese art has shown our artists a new way of beauty, in which, by painting light in all its splendid manifestations, a new vista of artistic possibilities has been opened up. The monistic thought of Oriental philosophy has been more and more approached and assimilated by our scientific system. Only narrow-mindedness can see in this civilization a danger which we must subdue; only ignorance can consider it as worthless and vicious. We can imagine no greater political crime, not only against the Orient, but against ourselves, than the attempt to turn Oriental civilization from its natural course of development into alien channels, to destroy its broad and noble ideals, its peaceful industrial life, in order to force it into a sham similitude with our system, with the result that its millions will be doomed to a new slavery to alien capital, or to the warlike ambitions of a victorious Czardom. Nor has there ever appeared in political discussion a greater folly than the effort to conjure up the phantom of a great warlike movement on the part of these essentially peaceful societies, and to preach the Machiavellian doctrine, "Destroy them before they can destroy us."

PAUL S. REINSCH.